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OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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PO BOX 202501  
HELENA MT 59620-2501  
[www.opi.state.mt.us](http://www.opi.state.mt.us)  
(406) 444-3095  
(888) 231-9393  
(406) 444-0169 (TTY)

Linda McCulloch  
Superintendent

February 16, 2005

The Honorable Dennis Rehberg  
Room 516 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Rehberg:

President Bush recently released his FY 2006 budget which builds upon his *No Child Left Behind* reforms. While the President's priorities received additional funding, several historically effective programs were either reduced in funding or eliminated. I appreciate the President funding his initiatives and promoting educational issues, however, the reduction or loss of other programs will hurt students and communities in Montana.

I am writing this letter to ask you for your continued support for these programs and understanding of how they impact Montana communities. I realize that you have been traditional supporters of programs such as those funded by the Perkins Act of 1998... the FFA, Business Professionals of America (BPA), DECA and others. In fact, several of our local FFA Chapters served as ushers and provided other help on the President's recent visit to Great Falls. Losing Perkins Act financial support would severely hamper or end many FFA and other student organization programs in Montana. I thank Senator Burns for his quick response to the President's budget and support for programs such as Even Start, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Vocational Education, GEAR-UP, and others. He stated in his February 7<sup>th</sup> news release: "These programs make a difference in the lives of Montana's young people and I will continue to work hard to ensure that these successful programs continue." "... and I will also work as a member of the Appropriations Committee to address funding shortfalls," said Burns." This support is deeply appreciated.

While I will not take the time to mention every program in this letter, each is important to the overall success of our students and to young adults in our communities. I have enclosed a copy of the U.S. Educational Funding chart for Montana, where you can see the impact of the President's budget. However, I do need to highlight several programs specifically. As I mentioned earlier, losing Perkins Act support would devastate or end numerous Career and Technical Education Programs such as the FFA. A list of these programs is found in the Fact Sheet regarding Career and Technical Education that I have enclosed.

Even Start in Montana is a program that works to break the cycle of illiteracy and poverty in some of our most high risk, needy areas. It works with the entire family and encourages parents

*"It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve."*

to take responsibility and become full partners in the education of their child. All of Montana's Even Start programs are found in high-poverty areas and help prepare children for success once they start school.

Prior to the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program, Montana had three or four drug and alcohol programs in our largest schools. Now, over 95% of Montana schools participate in the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program and have some kind of prevention effort in place. Drugs, alcohol and violence prevention in our schools is critical if we are to focus on academic success for all students.

Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) is slated for a 62% reduction. This program provides reading, math and core academic instruction for our adult population. These skills are imperative in the workplace and necessary for anyone to be successful. In some states, federal dollars supplement large state appropriations. The fact is that in Montana, state funding merely supplements the federal allocation. Thus, a reduction in federal funds means closing down adult literacy programs in Montana.

The loss of Educational Technology State Grants (Title II, Part D) would essentially eliminate the only on-going source of funds going to schools geared toward enhancing technology. I think the picture is pretty clear here... if Montana schools don't have this funding, our use of state-of-the-art technology will suffer... the experiences and opportunities our students have will be limited... and eventually, our students will not be as competitive as students from other states in postsecondary options and the workforce.

State Grants for Innovative Programs (Title V) provides the funding for Montana school districts to meet the needs of their students through the use of curriculum that have been shown to be effective based on scientifically based research. These programs must promote academic achievement, be standards-based and part of the school's overall reform strategy. The use of this funding allows great flexibility for Montana schools and encourages strategies that enhance learning that leads to academic improvement. The loss of these funds would limit our schools' flexibility and expanded programs.

Mathematics and Science Partnerships (Title II, Part B) is a program that fosters collaboration between high-need school districts and institutions of higher education (IHE) to improve instruction in math and science. The intent is to provide additional resources to those districts that really need them in order to enhance the curriculum for their students.

GEAR-UP in Montana is a collaborative effort between the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Office of Public Instruction. The program is focused on eliminating the barriers for low-income students to succeed in postsecondary programs. Without this program, breaking the cycle of poverty through education in many families would not be possible. This program has facilitated a smoother, more successful transition to postsecondary education.

Others, such as the elimination of the Byrd Honors Scholarship program, would mean that many of Montana's best and brightest high school graduates would not receive financial assistance in the form of grants to go to college.

These programs have educational implications for Montana's students and families and economic implications for our communities. They work to prepare students to enter school ready to learn, they provide a safe and drug-free environment, which promotes learning, and they work on academic skills. All of these help build a strong economy for Montana.

I thank you for your continued support of these critical programs and for your efforts on behalf of all Montanans. As we get closer to the time Congress will deal with appropriations for these programs, please let me know if additional information would be helpful. We are all working together in the best interest of all Montana's students, families and communities.

On a final note, it may be a good strategy for us to employ if we each designated a lead "education appropriation" contact so that your staff had a single point of contact in this agency for additional information regarding programs in Montana public schools and we had a single point of contact to call or send information to when we thought it was warranted. If you believe this would be beneficial as we all head into the appropriations phase, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Linda McCulloch  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction